

Cotton Harvest Underway In Santa Rosa County

Fields of snow white cotton can now be seen in northern Santa Rosa County, but not for long. Harvest of this year's cotton crop of nearly 30,000 acres is well underway.

In its October report, the USDA estimated U.S. production this year at 17.5 million bales. This is some 250,000 - 300,000 bales lower than industry expectations, due mainly to the summer's drought throughout the cotton belt.

Effects of the summer drought are being revealed locally. Fields that normally produce two bales per acre (1000 pounds of lint fiber) are only yielding one bale. Many fields were planted late due to lack of moisture. Farmers are praying that the season's first freeze will not come for a few more weeks to allow these late fields to mature. The value of this year's county crop is estimated to be between 11 and 12 million dollars.

After cotton leaves the farm it generates vigorous business activity for gins, cottonseed mills, warehouses, textile mills, cutters, merchandising establishments, transportation firms and others. Together, business revenue stimulated by the production and processing of cotton is estimated at some \$120 billion in the nations economy - the greatest of any U.S. crop.

Cotton is a versatile fiber noted for its appearance, performance, and natural comfort. It is the basic resource for thousands of useful products. U.S. textile mills are expected to spin more than 10 million bales of cotton this year. Typically, more than half (64 percent) goes into apparel, 28 percent into home furnishings, and 8 percent into industrial products. However, if it were all used to make a single product, such as men's jeans, it would make 3 billion pairs.

A major component of the cotton crop often overlooked is the seed produced along with the fiber. The seed is crushed to separate its three products: oil, meal and hulls. Cottonseed oil is used primarily in food products such as margarine, salad dressing and cooking oil. The meal and hulls are used in feed for livestock and poultry and as fertilizer.

Cotton exports contribute significantly to the reduction in the U.S. trade deficit. U.S. cotton sold overseas in recent years has averaged more than \$2 billion annually. Raw cotton is shipped mainly to Asian countries and to Mexico.

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